Raphael Bottazzini
Say My Name, Say My Name
26.08.23 – 26.10.23

The exhibition title "Say my name, say my name" softly resonates with the visitors almost as pleading song. Recognize me, name me, it seems to chant, underlining our human desire for clarity and honesty, our urge for things to be "called by their proper name".

The act of naming mentally captures the physical world around us, acknowledges its reality and gives it a place in our thinking. A name is a category, a label, a way of archiving the experienced world and is a projection surface.

The refusal or withdrawal of a name, of a clear designation, constitutes a refusal to recognize an individuality and an identity. „Say my name, say my name" is the claim, because what we can and want to name, we can communicate, we can exchange, we can convey it in our thoughts. How does our perception of ourselves and others become manifest? How do we recognize ourselves and others? And how – „say my name" – do we articulate this recognition vis-a-vis others?

This exchange, with communication being its brackets, forms the shared basis of Raphael Bottazzini's works. However different they initially appear in terms of form, in their various ways, they all recursively address the question of human identity, the „Who am I?" and the „Who are you?" and the „Who am I for you and you for me?". As visitors, thus absorbed with the other, we ourselves escape the fleeting nature of our world, flee from not being seen. Seemingly in play, Bottazzini transports us into a conscious perception of identities, of denominations – be it through confrontation („Curated Seeding") or irritation („Blueprint Identity", „Bench & Stack"). Again and again we wonder, ask ourselves, think and want to exchange ideas, want to „call things by their proper name".

Niels ten Brink, June 2023

Blueprint Identity　(Title: Raphael)

Twenty-five times the same person – twenty-four times Raphael Bottazzini. So what? Only slowly do we begin to consciously realize that something is wrong here. How can, or how should we trust our own perception in this? Which of these Bottazzinis, looking at us openly and directly, is the real Raphael Bottazzini? Well, all of them! The artist simply shifts the truth, almost imperceptibly, with a change in hairstyle here, slightly differing proportions there, so that no picture is exactly as the other. Yet all the variants have their basic ground plan in the one original, in the „blueprint" that helps us rediscover the identity within variation. The truth becomes fluid, and our recognition flows with it.

Curated Seeding

Raphael Bottazzini calls his social experiment "curated seeding". In the digital reality of Instagram, he brings together two complete strangers in an apparently random encounter. The term „seeding" is clearly ambiguous, as it equally describes the planned distribution of content on the Internet as well as the fertilizing of blossoms so that they may bear fruit. Bottazzini's tools as contact breeder are those of the new digital society: mobile phone photos, social networks and the screen names of the protagonists that inhabit them. The artist becomes the instigator of a social movement from which much can grow. The tension between control and arbitrariness, between chance and direction excites everyone involved in this triangular experiment. Bottazzini solely selects two people in an open social network and connects them via links. He simply sews the seeds of interaction. Whether they germinate remains in the hands of the chosen protagonists – Bottazzini becomes an outsider, at best an observer. Those brought into contact, however, need to come to terms with their own experimental role. Do I want to be connected with a random stranger? Do I want to communicate in such a way? Two inherent human behavioral patterns are brought into conflict – our shying away from the unfamiliar collides with our curiosity about the unknown. What grows from such is as random as life itself. What remains tangible is the resulting object alone – a doorbell with two handwritten Instagram names.

Bank & Stapel

As the title suggests, "Bench & Stack" is not a single work of art. Strictly speaking, it's not about the two terms alone, either. Rather, the bench and its wooden panels are both carriers and initiators of an extremely complex interaction between artist, material, word, viewers, their perceptions and memories. A total of six apparently randomly selected names can be found on the panels of the seat and the backrest, six names that are interchangeable. Then passers-by become participants – perhaps sitting alone or together, reflecting, wondering and discussing things. Where have the old names gone? Is memory deceiving me? Were the people always here? Have I forgotten? Why these names? What is their connection? Viewers need to immerse themselves in their own memories, activate a search process that questions their recollections, their view of the world and its protagonists. The work speaks of the coming and going of people in our perception, in our lives, of the dynamics inherent in social contacts. The bench itself is not static, neither physically nor in its message. The wooden panels are dismantled, neatly and accurately stacked on top of each other, recognizably separated by years. The result is a sculptural archive, a collective memory, a recollection of names, events, controversies that were relevant to the collective and the individual at a given point in time – that were remarkable or simply worth remembering. The fact that the apparently arbitrary and widespread choice of names repeatedly causes irritation is not only intended, but inevitable. With the transformative "Bench und Stack", Raphael Bottazzini creates a physical manifestation of our mnemonic perception. We recognize the people in our contemporary presence, we talk to them, we talk to others about them, evaluate and judge them, categorize and sort them. At some point, they might disappear from our immediate environment, we no longer see or hear them, know nothing more about them. We archive our knowledge and memories of them, we conserve the conversations we had with them or had about them. And with time, the details dwindle, become vague, just to eventually disappear altogether. What remains is a name in a stack.

Once Curated　(Title Anna Ehrenstein)

Renoir's „Two Sisters On the Terrace" is one of the impressionist's most popular works. In his portrayal of the actress Jeanne Darlot on a terrace in Chatou, the painter creates the impression of a spontaneous snapshot into which the younger child might have just accidentally stumbled. It did not happen by chance, though, and there was no family relation either. The viewer does not see two sisters here, despite the assertive title. Raphael Bottazzini's title "Once Curated – Anna Ehrenstein" is irritatingly different to start with. It exchanges the names, the identities and obfuscates our perception. The actress Jeanne Darlot becomes the multimedia artist Anna Ehrenstein by stroke of a pen. At first, the obvious change in headline surprises. Certainly none of the two people in the picture were called these names. There's confusion and curiosity as to what was overlooked. A small rose drawn on the left wrist, which adorns Anna Ehrenstein's wrist as a tattoo in the exact same place, shifts and changes realities. Instead of Darlot, we look at Ehrenstein, instead of Renoir, there's Bottazzini, instead of the past, now here's the present.
For us viewers, these are just the names of people about whom we may, with some luck, know a few things. Their true identity and nature are unknown to us. They are titles of pictures, names of places, of people who are fleeting, who slip away, and with them their meaning. Bottazzini fills these gaps with a tiny intervention. Into the painterly depiction of a past, forgotten artist, he invites a contemporary artist, and thus reinterprets it. It also is no longer the work of Renoir, it is the work of Raphael Bottazzini. So by sheer logical consequence, the painter's name is taped over and replaced by Bottazzini's signature.

LIS （Title: 0:33/4:08）

„LIS (Lost in space)" expands on Bottazzini's play with identity and situational recognition that ever accompanies our everyday lives. Choosing the music video for 50 Cent's hip-hop classic „In da Club", the artist references no less than the most successful genre video of all time, counting more than 1.5 billion views. In Bottazzini's work, the iconic rapper, hanging upside down, is no longer the center of attention. Bottazzini changes the narrativ. The well-known and elaborately staged protagonists are removed from the medical laboratory, the fitness room and the club, and an originally rather irrelevant figure is placed in front of a new, perhaps the ultimate background: an image of the universe. The figure thus becomes the main motif and – previously hardly noticed – the sole reference as one pondering the stars. Perhaps we recognize this woman from the scene with Eminem and Dr. Dre, perhaps she looks vaguely familiar, but we most likely don't know whom we're actually observing here, and why she is depicted gazing doubtfully into infinity. Should we not know her? Be able to pronounce her name? We know the protagonists in the original video, Eminem, Dr. Dre and 50 Cents. Even though they, too, are conceptions whom we can rarely call by their civic names, Marshall Mathers, André Romelle Young and Curtis James Jackson. So „Say my name" does not work here either? Doubts must creep into the viewers' minds. And yet it is simply the case that Raphael Bottazzini chooses to focus on a nameless, unknown person from a well-known video clip and present her in front of a background that shows everything and nothing at the same time. There is room for everyone in this universe, comes the message, even for those who initially appear as anonymous marginal figures. Shady Records, which released 50 Cents' „In da Club", by the way, is owned by Universal Group.

Kabinett, Büste 1

"Cabinet, Bust 1" is a consistent, even compelling conclusion to Raphael Bottazzini's series about the search for a mnemonic designation of things. It rounds up his plea „Say my name, say my name", which activates us as viewers and thus includes us in his works. It is an unusual work, as it does not reveal itself completely, does not allow for a clear view and unambiguous recognition. Behind a milky, semi-transparent partition we see, no, rather we suspect a bust, a head, a face. Its individual characteristics do not want to transpire unequivocally, they remain shadowy. We cannot clearly identify the person but we want to bypass the veil that clouds our perception. With a change of perspective, full of hope, we peek behind the barrier and are surprised: the hoped-for moment of clarifying knowledge does not set in, we cannot recognize the human traits of a face which might be familiar to us. Is what we see here, this amorphous shape now appearing almost random, really the image of a person? We are irritated, as we had just thought we'd know exactly what we were about to see. But it turns out that we conjured an image without knowing what of. Bottazzini shows us just how deceptive our supposedly clear perception, our all too unshakable knowledge, how uncertain our own memory can be. And he does so merely by mounting a cabinet on a thin, unstable, perhaps even fragile rod given its load. Memories are often vague, shadowy, hidden behind a veil, no longer accessible. They also are not permanent, do not last forever. So how am I supposed to name a person when they are so fleeting, so diffuse, so unstable? What we see here is not a concrete memory, there is no moment of individual recognition, as is perhaps the case when looking for the right Bottazzini in „Blueprint identity" or in the exchange and conversations with the people named in „Bench and stack". What the viewer finds visualized here is one of the greatest primal fears of man: to no longer recognize his surroundings, his fellow human beings, his family, and to falter. The loss of one's memories signifies the fall, the loss of oneself, of everything that defines us as individuals.

Niels ten Brink, June 2023